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## THE CHILD-MIND AND CHILD-RELIGION

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### III. THE METHOD OF EVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS AND OF RELIGION

The preceding articles have contained, by implication, evidence of two errors in the conventional interpretation, by mature persons, of the nature of child-consciousness. One of these errors is that of an unreflecting pedagogy that has carelessly assumed that children are like adults and may thrive on the mental and spiritual diet of their elders. On the other hand, psychology has made exactly the opposite mistake of assuming contrasts where none exist between child-nature and mature minds. Before the advent of developmental or comparative or genetic psychology, it was falsely supposed, although the groundwork for a better conception was laid by Descartes and Locke, that the "faculties" of the adult are somehow *given* facts of nature existing *sui generis*, and that somehow the growing baby comes into possession of them as he reaches the years of understanding. Such a conception can no longer hold its ground. Following the work of the group of men represented by Darwin, Romanes, Haeckel, Loeb, Ribot, James, and Baldwin, it is impossible to find a careful student of the mental life who does not proceed upon the assumption of the unity of the child and adult mind. There are no real leaps or slips or breaks in consciousness, but only occasional apparent ones, in passing from prenatal babyhood on through the stages of later life. The epochs form an entire continuum. The prevailing view is that the process is one of spontaneous unfolding, from within, of the resident qualities in child-consciousness. The problem is no longer concerned with the *fact* of such an evolution, but only to describe accurately its method. The article just preceding attempted to set forth some of the "root-principles" of consciousness—voluntary control, sense of self, adaptation of means to ends, discrimination, memory, association, judgment—many of which, by a faulty analysis,

have been attributed only to mature consciousness. In what follows, we shall assume the entire continuity in the mental life of individuals.

A second assumption, without which the following discussion will be more or less meaningless, is the truism, now universally accepted by students, of the continuity between human and other animal consciousness. The evolutionary doctrine now makes it clear that the life of all the species, including man, constitutes a unity. The kinship is shown unmistakably in the likeness in bodily structure and function and in similarities in mental traits. Perception, memory, association, volition, discrimination, and the adaptation of means to ends are common to all. There are almost no instinctive traits, such as fear, anger, love, self-regard, imitativeness, playfulness, gregariousness, and the like, that are not found also in child-nature. This wide and deep kinship between man and other animals is unconsciously recognized in the warm attachment of men to animals, and it is not to be wondered at that the sense of oneness and fellowship has blossomed into clear consciousness in great minds and hearts, as when St. Francis of Assisi called the animals his brothers, and when Christ seemed to possess such a tender feeling toward all living things. This unity is shown most certainly, perhaps, by embryology; for during prenatal life the common characteristics of the human and other species are evident in an exaggerated form. The study of embryonic life has demonstrated the further significant principle that each individual passes through, in succession, approximately all the stages of animal life that have preceded it. Each person at his inception is a single-celled organism like an amoeba; later, he has a tubular nervous system and rudimentary urinal glands connecting with the skin like the worm; after many transformations he possesses a notochord similar to that of the sturgeon and amphioxus; he imitates the life of the water-breathing animals by having gill-slits and other corresponding parts; shows his oneness with the other mammalia by having four feet and an elongated caudal appendage. Each person travels first the great highway of race development and finally specializes, as does each animal, into his own particular sideroad toward his own species, and then along the ever-diverging by-paths that take him in the direction of his own subdivision of the human race, then to his own nation, family, and immediate parentage. The study of the

*mental* life of children and the epochs through which they pass is doing its part also in making indubitable the law that the individual recapitulates in itself the history of the race. This simple truth has shown in a wonderful way how the life of each is bound up in the world-life. It is no longer left simply to a feat of the imagination or to blind faith to see that God is the life of the world and to appreciate the oneness that exists between his immanent self and the life of the individual. To summon mankind into a vitalizing sense of the kinship of its profounder life and this universal life seems to be the central message of religions everywhere. The price of individuality, whether in the case of a leaf of a tree, the body of a fish, or the soul-life of a man, is possible separation. Human life, the most complex of all the types, has a thousand by-paths into which it may wander and lose its connection with the whole. Manifold streams of race tendency, like so many well springs, pour into each human life, each of which in turn may overwhelm him. His surroundings are infinitely diverse and may arouse impulses and desires that destroy the inner harmony until it is no longer a true reflection of the absolute of which it is a part. It is the function of religion to preserve the unity of the personal life at the point at which its wholeness is threatened, to insure the harmony that should exist between the individual and the universal life, and to restore such a harmony when once it has been lost.

There is still a third assumption underlying the following discussion that may well be kept in view: religion is an integral part of the developing life of mankind. It is not a superimposed something. It is native to consciousness. It is a phase of life in process of evolution. The devotee may continue to regard it as a revelation of divine truth to man. But it is also a self-revelation of consciousness to itself, just as the will is first unconscious volitional attitude and then shows itself as conscious choice; and as all states and processes are originally subliminal and gradually emerge, or often burst, into the focal points of clear consciousness. Religion may be described in terms of the feeling of relation existing between the individual and absolute (the psychological theological problem) or in terms of the setting of the spiritual life among the various mental processes, such as intellect, feeling, and will (the structural psychological problems) or in terms of the nature of religion as a sense of the harmonious or

inharmonious relationship existing among the various elements of consciousness in so far as this sense affects the highest, permanent, spiritual well-being of the individual and of the social group (the functional or genetic psychological problem).

Our inquiry will naturally adopt the genetic point of view. Its problem is to trace out some points in the natural history of the mental life and of the religious consciousness. Starting with the stock of instinct feelings and instinct reactions common to animals and children (since these are the elements of consciousness most easily traceable), what is the method by which these are transformed toward the attainment of the highest spirituality? We shall have to trace some of the primal instincts and see how each becomes an ingredient in mature life. To detect accurately these strains is difficult and often impossible. There are so many complications and refinements that the original factors sometimes lose their identity, and are misinterpreted, just as an unpracticed observer may not see the relation between the materials that go into a modern refinery or factory and the finished products that come from it. It will be possible to proceed with greater certainty if it can be done in the light of some of the principles in accordance with which the process takes place. There are at least four such principles that are more or less clear and unmistakable.

1. The primitive instinct tendencies become refined by being carried up onto higher levels of consciousness. What these levels consist in is best seen in terms of the analogy of the structure of the nervous system. It was a most helpful truth, first enunciated by Hughlings Jackson,<sup>1</sup> that the nervous system is a stratified organism. The first stratum or level in the order of development is the spinal cord and medulla, which are the seat of organic reactions and reflex movements. This is completed before birth in the human species, and is the center of the personality of the infant. The second stratum is the mechanism of sensory response at the base of the brain and the sensory centers in the cerebrum. The center of gravity of the child's consciousness during the early years of its life is in this level, as shown

<sup>1</sup> *British Medical Journal*, 1898, p. 65. For a full account of Jackson's views, see his "Croonian Lectures," published in the *British Medical Journal*, 1884. Cf. also his remarks on Dr. Mercier's paper on "Inhibition," in *Brain*, XI, 361.

by its absorption in things that appeal to its motor and sensory experience. The third level consists in higher centers of cerebral co-ordination, with their millions of nerve elements, by means of which the elements of experience are brought into new and varied combinations. This is the seat of the life of thinking, feeling, and willing, and under normal conditions the self should shift its center of gravity into this level by the time it reaches maturity. As will be evident in a later article, the normal period for this latter translation of the center of the self is during early adolescence. Each level is a direct outgrowth of the last, and blossoms out of it as new structures are needed to answer the demands of a widening life in its response to a complicated environment. This view of Hughlings Jackson, considerably distorted from its original statement, I admit, though like the above account in spirit, furnishes basis for a true account of the development of instinct in one of its aspects. Each instinct is carried up, in both individual and race development, progressively from lower toward higher planes of expression, and constitutes a strain in the evolved intellectual, volitional and aesthetic life. Ribot has named this particular mode of development transition by "complete evolution."<sup>2</sup> The instinct keeps its original character but is transformed from a relatively simple to a very complex psychosis. According to Ribot the evolution consists in intellectualizing the primary instinct. It seems, however, that the primary reactions are as much emotionalized and voluntarized as intellectualized during the process, and that the change consists in a "complication of the native reactions" as James<sup>3</sup> calls it. Each function ramifies into great complexity, as does a tree or any growing thing. An example of complete evolution, or complication, is the instinct of hunger. The organism seeks to take over into itself and assimilate as much of the world as it can. First it is hunger simply for food for the body. As soon as the senses are differentiated as special organs of adjustment, they are also hungry for that which will stimulate and nourish—are hungry for experiences. The healthy child seeks to devour all the sensory experiences it can. Sights, sounds, tastes, smells, muscle and touch experiences, are the

<sup>2</sup> Ribot, *The Psychology of the Emotions*, p. 262.

<sup>3</sup> See James's delightful discussion of this principle in his *Talks to Teachers*, chaps. vi, vii, viii.

things it craves and by which it grows. The instinct of curiosity seems to be an offshoot from this organic hunger as a means of leading the animal into new experiences. Mentality is a still higher instrument of adjustment. A healthy mind also craves nourishment, and it is probably no accident of speech by which the desire is called a hunger for truth. When this craving involves the highest abstractions of consciousness and seeks after the highest objects of fulfilment concerning the existence of which the mind has many an inkling but no clear knowledge, it is a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, a characterization so accurate that it can hardly be called a figure of speech.

Any and all of the instincts would illustrate the principle of direct evolution. Fear is first a shrinking from anything that threatens the well-being of the bodily self. Later it consists in a dread of evil consequences of certain kinds of conduct to one's moral or social welfare. It ripens into a recoil from that which will despoil one's highest sense of beauty or truth and into a fear of God which is the beginning of wisdom. Love is primarily a sense of rapport with parents, offspring, mates, and whatever objects are near and dear. It follows the widening circle of relationships, love for friends, relatives, clan, country, until it bursts into a complete heart attitude and includes humanity and even one's enemies. With the growth of abstraction which makes possible the sentiments and ideals, it becomes a love of truth, goodness, and beauty. The obsession of the poet and artist and the mystic rapture of the saint are among its fruits.<sup>4</sup> The love of a child for its brother whom it has seen, and for its dolls, pets, and other objects of affection is its schooling toward the love of God whom it has not seen.

<sup>4</sup> The most voluminous presentation of the evolution of love is in G. Stanley Hall's volume, *Adolescence*, chaps. x, xi, xii. Dr. Hall regards the higher life of man as an irradiation of love, and affirms that the source of the love impulse is the sex instinct. His theory is true in what it affirms. It fails to recognize, however, that religion, aesthetics, and morality are an irradiation of *all* the instincts, and that sex is no more prominent in the final compounding of developed product than are some of the others. For a criticism of the point of view see James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 10-12, and my volume, *The Psychology of Religion*, pp. 207, 401-407. From the following discussion it will be evident that Dr. Hall has made too simple a story out of a complicated plot by taking into account only one out of the several principles according to which the instincts develop.

An instructive instance of direct evolution is that of self-regard. The instinct of self-preservation, which has been called the first law of life, constitutes the central stream of animal and child-consciousness. Teeth, horns, and tusks, anger, hatred, and jealousy and all the means of attack and defense are its signs. Among adults, policemen, courts, armies, battleships, jails, arbitration tribunals, and locks and keys, are monuments to the strength of the impulse. Although so insistent a fact of life as to be habitually branded as a vice, if self-regard seeks for itself some more roundabout mode of expression and so looks less simple, and crass, it may be condoned or even admired. A man who would not steal will sometimes consent to amass wealth by lively business tactics, even to the length of driving his competitors to the wall, and public sentiment may even praise his shrewdness, while it punishes as a criminal him who loots or browbeats his neighbor. So do men use bits of philanthropy to gain a business advantage, resort to "pulls" to gain political prestige, seek social preferment to the disadvantage of others, and the act is not severely condemned. A still farther step in the refinement makes of self-seeking a virtue. Hedonism in ethics, that sets up the highest pleasures and good as ends of life, finds great-souled spokesmen and adherents in every age. It has been and is stoutly preached by divines like Paley, Warburton, and Van Dyke, as a legitimate religious motive. The songs people sing and the prayers they utter betray a longing for health, peace, success, contentment, and temporal and eternal well-being. Christianity and Mohammedanism have popularly pictured as an incentive to the higher life a heaven of happiness, elegance, and luxury, fit for an irresponsible king. The impulse of self-regard is not to be despised. Among children and untutored persons it must be one of the chief springs of action. In cultivated natures it furnishes also, in a refined form, a legitimate strain. It is an evil when excessively simple and unrefined, or when it exists at the expense of other impulses or uses them in an unwarranted way to further its ends. In its developed form it is an ingredient in the highest spirituality as, for instance, when in the golden rule and in the second commandment, it is made the measure of love.

2. The character of the primary instincts is somewhat transformed by repression and inhibition. When held back from their habitual



mode of immediate expression, they become tempered and softened, until, to superficial observation, they present the appearance of separate reactions from the original form. This has been designated by Ribot as the principle of the "arrest of development."<sup>5</sup> Grief, through repression, becomes sorrow; and this, by further refinement, enters into the complex emotion, resignation. The method of repression, by which the instincts are softened, seems to be twofold: inhibition by other instincts and changes in the environment by which the original direct expression would be harmful. The softening of pain into grief and of grief into resignation is an illustration of the first method, the original expression having been checked by a feeling of pride and a developing aesthetic sense. An illustration of the other method is found in the conversion of sexual love into higher forms. As the changes in modes of life from individualistic customs to more compact social groups have rendered the immediate expression harmful, the repressed impulse has, like a sprouting plant temporarily shut back from its direct course by a clod or other obstruction, shot up its tendrils wherever it could in the form of modesty, courtship, the aesthetics of the love passion, and in the various kinds of endearment.<sup>6</sup> In its higher forms by further repression these constitute an element in mystic and platonic love.

Many other illustrations of such transformation will occur to the mind of the reader. Pleasures of a spectacular sensuous kind pass over into joys and these into ecstatic contemplation. Anger repressed shows itself as hatred and this, when it can no longer express itself with taste and propriety, passes into the haughty look, the sneer, contempt, or resentment, and by a further step becomes indignation, and, if the object seems worthy a total reaction of opposition, it becomes "righteous indignation." There are many instinctive traits whose existence appears almost solely for the sake of insuring such arrests of primary reactions. Among these are coyness, modesty, the forms of propriety, taciturnity, stubbornness and pouting, and pleasures in secrecy and solitude. They are nature's instruments for refining life. Her method is similar to that of the gardener, who, by smothering or by pruning, is able to improve the quality of flowers or fruit. The

<sup>5</sup> Ribot, *op. cit.*, pp. 264-67.

<sup>6</sup> See Ribot, *op. cit.*, pp. 248 ff.

chief problem in the spiritual culture of children is to interpret the meaning of the various native endowments and be nature's helper in carrying out her purposes.

3. A third principle according to which the primary endowments evolve is that of substitution.<sup>7</sup> Life is essentially dynamic; and the amount of available energy, aside from variations in health and nutrition, is practically a constant quantity. Like spending-money, if more of it is used up in one direction there is less available in another. If a desirable instinct can be stimulated in excess, the chances are it detracts from the exercise of another less desirable one. The gamester has no energy left with which to appreciate works of art nor has the child who is fully occupied with social responsiveness or with happy occupation of an innocent kind any capacity for the mean and low. There is also the same equivalence in the child's interests, which are the criteria of spontaneous vitality, as in its stock of energy. The mind cannot be a vacuum. Those interests that first possess it may hang up their sign of preoccupation and none others need apply for space. An idle brain, the nearest approach possible to vacancy, cannot remain so long; for old race-grown impulses, overinsistent and out of tune with the present, will use it for their workshop. Wisdom on the part of parent or teacher is measured by their power of driving out lower impulses with higher ones. Even little children often master the principle when they gain possession of much-desired toys from other children by extolling the real or imaginary value of some other toy. It is impossible wilfully to uproot an impulse or desire. It is relatively easy to cast out the evil with the good. A healthy nature of a child instinctively resents the arbitrary prohibition of his ill temper and combativeness, and may even defend his position by appealing to pride in his ability to take his own part and his knight-errantry in redressing his wrongs; but if led indirectly to appreciate the heroism of self-control and to take pride in his superiority to trifling situations, the blemish will fall away of its own accord. The expulsive power of a new affection is proverbial. The application of the principle of substitution, being a positive and not a negative procedure, should make the cultivation of spirituality a natural process at many a point at which it is now a twisting and tearing and uprooting proced-

<sup>7</sup> See James, *Talks to Teachers*, pp. 39-43.

ure. The highways are numerous in child-nature that lead in the direction of the highest spirituality.

4. The instincts change their appearance in the course of their development also by a process of admixture or composition.<sup>8</sup> Few of them, indeed, exist singly. The higher mental states are usually points of combination of two or several simple instincts, first refined and then blended. Melancholy is a sweet sadness that Ribot calls the "luxury of grief." Remove either the pleasure or the sadness and the melancholy disappears. Jealousy is not a primary emotion, but seems to be compounded from a sense of self, an instinct of possession, a feeling of attachment, fear lest the object of affection should escape, and anger or resentment. Love may be the refinement of the attachments that spring up in the social group, as when ants and other asexual types show signs of complete devotion to one another, or it may have its source in the reproductive instinct as this has widened through mating and the family, according to the partial description of Drummond in *The Ascent of Man*. In its purest form it appears to be a perfect blending of the two streams plus an aesthetic sense that has arisen as much from contact with nature in its varying presentations of color, form, and relation as from either of these two sources. It has also an admixture of a self-feeling as shown by the fact that love, even in its highest reaches, is never wholly disinterested. Each of the two main streams in the final combination is itself an admixture. Spencer has, perhaps, analyzed, more or less accurately, sexual love into several different ingredients<sup>9</sup>. The principle of the compounding of the primary and derived instincts has an interesting bearing upon the matter of the estimation of character. As instinct reactions become transformed into motives and desires they form a rich complex. The doer of a deed is likely to credit himself with generosity as a motive, and it may be with justice. Another person may name the motive fear or sympathy or compassion and perhaps rightly. At a diverse angle another may claim, with equal accuracy, that it was actuated by self-interest. The most perfect deed may spring from many motives, as white light is composed of a bundle of colors.

We are now in a position to see that the religious impulse, while

<sup>8</sup> Ribot, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-73.

<sup>9</sup> Spencer, *Principles of Psychology*, par. 215.

given a single name, as if it were a simple pulse of consciousness, is a compound. It contains fear: a shrinking at the thought of reaping the consequences of doing violence to the eternal and inviolable laws of the universe. One of its ingredients is love: a sense of rapport and heart kinship with those things that have highest worth. It draws from sociality: a longing for companionship with an absolute, spiritual, personal reality. It receives a strain from curiosity: a desire to feel its way into the mysteries of life and of eternity. It is fed by self-regard: a wish to be saved, and not to be left behind as a scattered fragment in a universe in which all the parts seem to be conserved into unity. It is a hungering and thirsting of the soul to assimilate the truth that lies behind the piecemeal bits of reality that are offered by sense and reason. It is the struggle for existence and the will to live, as these have ripened into an aspiration toward the perfect life. It is the play impulse, as this has blossomed out into spontaneous acts of worship and exultation of spirit. It is perhaps many things besides. In a later article we shall see that religion has sprung up, in part, as a means of insuring the healthy development of the various components of consciousness and of preserving a harmonious relationship among them.

The point of value so far is to appreciate that religion is not a simple fact that is to be administered in set doses to children but that both religion and the child are complex facts that have definite laws of development. The task of those who would direct the spiritual culture of children is to be workers together with nature, through trying to understand what the processes are that are taking place in the growth of children and also in the development of religion.